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TITLE: The NIAID AIDS Vaccine Website— A site for discovery and development

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ISSUE: The internet provides a valuable tool for enhancing communicating about AIDS vaccine issues.

SETTING: The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) created a website to regularly update the general public, scientific community and others regarding important AIDS vaccine issues. It is located on NIAID's homepage and can be accessed at www.niaid.nih.gov/aidsvaccine

PROJECT: The development of an AIDS vaccine to prevent HIV infection is a global health priority. Every day 16,000 people around the world are infected with HIV. To speed the pace of HIV vaccine discovery, many agencies have dramatically increased the resources devoted to HIV vaccine research. As part of this expanded effort, NIAID has awarded numerous grants to foster innovative research on HIV vaccines, and is invigorating and reorganizing its vaccine clinical trials effort. The Institute also is preparing for eventual large-scale efficacy trials of HIV vaccines by establishing community linkages and conducting the epidemiological, virologic, and behavioral research required to ensure the success of such trials.

In order to carry out this agenda many different scientific disciplines must cooperate and communicate. To foster communication around research issues and to encourage dialog before a large-scale study begins, NIAID developed an AIDS vaccine web site. It is designed to (1) create a resource of scientific and technical information for researchers, (2) enhance visibility of NIAID supported AIDS vaccine research, and (3) provide a forum for proactively communicating about AIDS vaccine research. Information is organized into six key areas: *News*, which includes timely commentaries and reviews; *Overview*, which includes information about NIAID's mission, organization, and the AIDS Vaccine Research Committee; *General Information*, which includes basic information about AIDS and AIDS vaccines; *Funding*; *Science*, which provides an overview of key scientific research areas and priorities; and *Resources & Links*.

RESULTS: The AIDS Vaccine website went live on January 3, 1999. On February 2 PBS aired an AIDS special and referred viewers to this website. The following day traffic to NIAID's web site tripled from the average 10,000 daily hits to 28,000. This increase was attributed primarily to referrals from the PBS telecast. (NOTE: information about traffic to the AIDS vaccine section of the NIAID page was not available). During the following two months, traffic has continued to increase. By the end of March traffic to the NIAID homepage had reached a half-million hits a month.

LESSONS LEARNED: This web site is a powerful communication tool for NIAID. It allows for rapid dissemination of information and provides a forum for keeping the research community and general public informed of scientific highlights and new programs in AIDS vaccine research.

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